



**THE ERISA
INDUSTRY COMMITTEE**
*Shaping benefit policies
before they shape you.*

JAMES GELFAND
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs

May 25, 2022

The Honorable Chris Murphy
United States Senate
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murphy and Dr. Cassidy,

On behalf of The ERISA Industry Committee (ERIC), thank you for your leadership in introducing the *Mental Health Reform Reauthorization Act of 2022* (S. 4170) that would reauthorize critical federal mental health and substance use disorder programs that are set to expire in September 2022. We appreciate your leadership in recognizing the importance of these programs that were signed into law in 2016 as part of the *Mental Health Reform Act*.

ERIC is a national nonprofit organization exclusively representing the largest employers in the United States in their capacity as sponsors of employee benefit plans for their nationwide workforces. With member companies that are leaders in every economic sector, ERIC is the voice of large employer plan sponsors on federal, state, and local public policies impacting their ability to sponsor benefit plans and to lawfully operate under ERISA's protection from a patchwork of different and conflicting state and local laws, in addition to federal law.

ERIC's large employer member companies, seeing a rise in mental health and substance use disorder cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, worked quickly to expand access to mental and behavioral health services for employees. Your legislation coincides with many of the policies proposed in our report "[Prioritizing Employee Mental Health: Solutions for Congress](#)." Specifically, your legislation would:

- **Increase education funding for provider programs, especially the minority fellowship program.** The bill will incentivize even more diverse health care workers and students to train and become familiar with mental and behavioral health treatments, and realigns existing funds to prioritize mental health specialties.
- **Integrate multiple health care disciplines through collaboration to provide patients with higher quality care.** Patients increasingly rely on primary care providers, who oversee their "medical homes," to provide mental health care, including the prescribing of various medications. Your legislation will ease a transition for coordinated care between interdisciplinary teams and promote new programs within health care settings.
- **Encourage innovation and evidence-based programs within the National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory.** The bill can help the Policy Lab evaluate and promote innovative models that will benefit from further development and scaling to improve care for employees, retirees, and their families.

- **Evaluate data collection and public reporting on mental health and substance abuse grants and programs.** Plan sponsors work to ensure that beneficiaries have access to quality care. This includes building networks that eschew dangerous, ineffective providers and facilities with mental health and substance use disorder programs. The legislation you introduced would require the Government Accountability Office to perform a study to improve data collection, evaluate program performance, and recommend better ways to report to the public overall, enhancing the current grant system and existing programs.

As the *Mental Health Reform Reauthorization Act of 2022* progresses through the legislative process, we hope to work with you to add even more solutions outlined in our report that would benefit American workers and their families. This would include policies to improve patients' mental health, promote access, drive value, and save money for taxpayers and the federal government. We have been proud to work with your offices on policies such as interstate licensure for providers, expanded access to telehealth, and flexibility for employers to innovate new mental health benefits would truly transform the health care system – and hope to see some of these solutions included in a final bill.

Additionally, your bill focuses on helping patients, not on punishing employers. Employers support many innovative solutions in the behavioral and mental health space, and we applaud you for focusing on areas of consensus, rather than pursuing partisan and unproductive proposals designed to cast blame and aspersions, rather than improve care for patients.

ERIC is proud to support your legislation, as we believe it will increase access to mental health providers and programs, improving mental and behavioral health care, and have a meaningful impact on patients' lives. We look forward to supporting your efforts on this significant issue, and working to pass this bill into law.

Sincerely,



James P. Gelfand
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs